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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 003308

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/NGA AND PRM/ANE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [IZ](#) [LE](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: MONITORING AND EVALUATING ICMC'S HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE PROJECT FOR VULNERABLE IRAQIS IN LEBANON

REF: A. EXUM/POLASCHIK E-MAIL 1/21/03

[B](#). AMMAN 1587

[1](#)1. Embassy Beirut cleared this message.

[1](#)2. As requested ref a, Regional Refcoord monitored the International Catholic Migration Commission's (ICMC) humanitarian assistance project for vulnerable Iraqis in Lebanon on May 13, 2003. Report is keyed to questions provided ref a.

[1](#)A. On May 13, refcoord and Embassy Beirut poloff met with ICMC Forced Migration Specialist Jim Kelly, Project Director Thomas Vasseur and Caritas/Lebanon Migrants Center Director Najla Chahda. They also held a separate discussion with the project's implementing team of one project officer, five social workers and one unpaid student intern, focusing on the social and economic conditions facing vulnerable Iraqis in Lebanon.

[1](#)B. Although ICMC was slow in starting the project (see para D for details), it is now doing a solid job of providing services to vulnerable Iraqis. ICMC's new outreach to the Iraqi community (previously limited to church-based referrals among the Iraqi Christian community) has revealed a very vulnerable, marginalized population without access to GOL services -- and without many other sources of assistance. With a current caseload of 60 families per week, ICMC should meet its goal of assisting 900 families by the end of the grant.

[1](#)C. ICMC spent the first four months of this project identifying office space and staff. A new international project director (Vasseur) began work on November 15, 2002, while key locally hired staff -- including ICMC's first-ever Muslim social worker in Lebanon -- began work in January [1](#)2003. ICMC then conducted staff training and began work in earnest in February 2003. Due to unforeseen difficulties in community outreach (see para D), ICMC's initial client base was quite limited: 44 families in the first three months of the project and 221 families by mid-May. However, due to ICMC's ongoing intensive outreach in the poor Beirut suburbs of Hay El Selloun, Burj el Barajneh refugee camp (where many poor Iraqis squat in homes abandoned by Palestinian refugees) and now in southern Lebanon, ICMC is interviewing 60 cases per week. At the current rate, ICMC most likely will reach its planned objective of 900 families by August 31. As outlined in the grant agreement, ICMC is providing outpatient and inpatient medical care, as well as basic humanitarian assistance packages. Although ICMC provided primary school tuition assistance early in the project, it only began the planned informal afternoon school sessions in April 2003, due to difficulties in identifying and recruiting qualified teachers. ICMC admits it did not submit the required interim report on-time but claims it was submitted to PRM/C in April [1](#)2003. ICMC has shared with refcoord only draft project updates that included neither a detailed breakdown of services provided nor any financial information.

[1](#)D. As in the similar PRM-funded project in Jordan (ref b), ICMC initially had a difficult time reaching out to the Iraqi community and advertising its services. Most Iraqis in Lebanon lack legal status and financial resources and therefore are either afraid or unable to seek assistance; ICMC social workers report that many Iraqis lack even the taxi fare to reach the Caritas center in downtown Beirut. Although ICMC planned to conduct community outreach via an Iraqi Project Advisory Committee (that would include representation from the various Iraqi religious and ethnic communities present in Lebanon), political sensitivities precluded its formation. ICMC instead sends its social workers out into the community to spread word of the project and identify prospective beneficiaries. ICMC reports that since it has begun field visits in earnest, its caseload has tripled. Its field work has proven somewhat dangerous in southern Lebanon, where a social worker was detained by Hizballah and accused of proselytizing.

Separately, ICMC also seems to have gotten a slow start in implementing the project due largely to its focus on helping Caritas Lebanon identify new space for its Migrants Center and implementing three other projects that were funded at roughly the same time. (The projects include an EU-funded

human rights for asylum seeker project; a G/TIP-funded safe house; and a separate PRM-funded legal and social protection project for non-Palestinian refugees, reported septel.) ICMC reports that it simply was unable to accommodate all four new programs in Caritas' existing office space. In addition to space constraints, Embassy Beirut and refcoord suspect that ICMC may have taken on more projects and funding than it could handle.

1E. ICMC currently has eight staff working on this project: Kelly, Chahda and the project implementation team of one project officer, five social workers and an unpaid student intern. Kelly and Vasseur (who left the project in late May to work for the UN in Iraq) have shared the role of project management. Although Kelly initially planned to oversee the project on his own, ICMC decided to bring in an additional international employee (Vasseur) to manage this project after ICMC was awarded several other grants at the same time. ICMC reports that only one half of one international salary was paid by this grant, as stipulated in the cooperative agreement. Separately, ICMC has rotated the project officer position between two individuals, who have been detailed periodically to Syria to assist in the establishment of a similar Caritas project there. ICMC reports that the project officer's salary has been paid with PRM funds only for work performed in Lebanon. The personnel appear to be fully and gainfully employed.

1F. ICMC's project is run from Caritas' brand-new Migrants Center. The center is spacious and well-equipped with new furniture and furnishings, all of which appear to be in working condition. Four offices were equipped and furnished by this grant, and an acceptable inventory control system is in place.

1G. N/A

1H. ICMC plans to seek funding to extend this project for an additional 12 months, both to continue providing assistance to vulnerable Iraqis and to help this particular group prepare for a return to Iraq. ICMC is in discussions now with partners Catholic Relief Services and International Orthodox Christian Charities to fold this particular project (as well as the similar PRM-funded project in Jordan) into a larger regional return plan. Given the difficult circumstances facing Iraqis resident in Lebanon (illegal status, limited work opportunities and no access to GOL services) as well as the Lebanese Government's likely unwillingness to allow any local integration of this population, vulnerable Iraqis will continue to need basic humanitarian assistance as well as extra assistance in planning their eventual return to Iraq.

Although ICMC's implementation of the current project has been far from perfect, refcoord believes that a 12-month extension of this project would advance PRM's regional policy goals. There are very few NGOs in Lebanon with existing Iraqi assistance programs and ICMC is therefore better positioned than most to take on eventual return assistance programs. Rather than wasting months in start-up time with a new NGO partner, PRM could benefit from the existing, well-trained staff and infrastructure funded by this grant. Strong words from PRM regarding ICMC's reporting responsibilities hopefully would encourage ICMC to meet its obligations in a more timely fashion. Refcoord therefore recommends that PRM favorably consider ICMC's proposal. Embassy Beirut agrees that ICMC appears to have overcome its slow start on this project and is likely to meet the project goal of assisting 900 Iraqi families. ICMC social workers are establishing a credible track-record among the Iraqi community and are well-positioned to provide assistance to this group and prepare them for eventual return. Embassy Beirut supports Refcoord's recommendation for a 12-month extension of this project and strict reporting requirements for ICMC.

GNEHM